

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY GROUPS PROVIDE CRITICAL INPUT

INTRODUCTION

As counties and communities in a watershed go through the flood mapping lifecycle, it is critical not only the public be kept informed, but also external stakeholders who utilize or may be affected by the new flood maps. While it is important to keep everyone informed throughout the entire process, a critical period of involvement starts after the draft work maps are reviewed and the release of the preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) is nearing. This is the time stakeholders should become aware of the new flood maps and be educated about the process, potential changes and their effects, as well as options available. Well-informed stakeholders can then help carry the key messages to the public once the maps are released.

This process may take up to three months, but it is an important three months for outreach. It is recommended that the counties and communities in the watershed meet with the various key stakeholders and serious consideration be given to creating a stakeholder advisory group.

DIVERSITY PROVIDES ROUNDED FEEDBACK

When creating a stakeholder advisory group, consider including representatives from industries and organizations that may have a stake in the effort or may be affected by the new FIRMs. The more diverse the group, the more useful the feedback and input received. This group could include a member(s) from the following industries or groups:

- Real Estate
- Lending
- Insurance
- Homeowner Association
- Civic Organizations
- Economic Development Council
- Chamber(s) of Commerce
- Key or Special Interest Groups
- Academia



In addition to these members, there should be a representative from all participating communities and if possible a public relations/communications staff member from a county or large community.

Depending upon the size of the communities and counties in a watershed, some associations and organizations may have local chapters while others may only have county, regional or state chapters. The chart on the next page provides a starting point for some of these national associations to help you find a local, regional or state chapter.

INFORMED STAKEHOLDERS CARRY CONSISTENT MESSAGES

One of the main goals of forming the stakeholder advisory group is to keep as many stakeholders informed and educated about the new maps, the process, the effects and the options so they share it with their members. During the stakeholder meetings, consistent messages and information must be provided by the county and communities.

Meetings are best held in person; however, due to the size of some watersheds, this may not be practical for all participants. Using video conferencing can be an option (e.g., WebEx). PowerPoint presentations, whether presented via a projector and/or via hardcopy, along with fact sheets are an excellent method for disseminating information. In addition, a more robust section of the watershed's county and community websites should be created to explain this process, the effects of the map

changes, options available, and additional resources. Any guest speakers from the county or communities need to be prepped to ensure they stay on message.

The fact sheets and talking points provided during the previous phases can be used and additional outreach material created. When holding these meetings, it is important the county and participating communities document each meeting (e.g., who attended, what was presented, what was distributed, where and when it was held) and keep this log updated. There will be times when local government officials or the media may ask what has been done to inform the public, and these records allow for a quick and accurate response.

Another critical goal is getting the stakeholders' feedback, concerns, issues, etc. early in the process. This allows county and community officials time to address concerns before the actual preliminary FIRMs are available for public review and comment. Some of the issues and concerns may be able to be addressed in advance so they are corrected, improved or better communicated. It is important each concern or issue, as well as suggestion are seriously addressed, or the group will feel they are not valued and will stop participating.

KEEPING THEM INFORMED

As mentioned, a main goal of forming this group is to keep the members educated and informed, and in turn their respective organizations updated with the most current and correct information. Besides the initial meeting, others should be held when important information needs to be shared or critical issues arise. These participants are volunteering their time, so it must be made worthwhile; otherwise, their participation and attendance will decline and so will the success of the group.

In between meetings, the members can be kept updated via email or mail. These do not have to be long or wordy, but rather provide information such as schedule updates, new outreach documents, links to pertinent webpages, new information on the county or community website, or announcements of the next meeting.

Since the public will eventually be contacting one or more of these stakeholders, this advisory group can be one of the best outreach tools a community or county can have. They serve as a trusted source of the public and will provide the public with the correct messages, the proper information, and the important options they have when the flood maps are released.